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Delta residents can speak out on CalFed plan

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■ Walnut Grove public hearing will be the first of 17 across the state

By Matt Weiser
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WALNUT GROVE — Delta residents have a huge stake in restoring the complex estuary they call home, but their voices are rarely heard on the issue.

An opportunity to change that comes Wednesday in Walnut Grove as CalFed holds a public hearing on its Delta restoration plans. It is the only public hearing on the CalFed plan scheduled in the heart of the Delta for a project that could change the region forever.

The CalFed Bay-Delta Program began in 1995 by joint declaration of Gov. Pete Wilson and the Clinton administration. Its mission is to solve environmental and water supply problems in the Delta, the state's largest drinking water source.

The Delta was originally a vast inland marsh teeming with wildlife. Today powerful pumps divert much of that fresh water to Southern California cities. This siphoning causes salty ocean water to intrude, altering habitats and harming local water quality.

Flooding has also increased due to aging levees and land settling on

MEETING

What: CalFed public hearing on plans to restore the Delta

When: Q&A at 6 p.m., hearing at 7 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Jean Harvie Community Center, 14273 River Road, Walnut Grove, off Highway 160 north of Rio Vista

Information: 916-657-2666, 800-700-5752 or <http://calfed.ca.gov>

Delta island interiors.

In March, CalFed released a draft plan offering three alternatives:

■ Leave the water-delivery system essentially as it is in the Delta.

■ Create a "through-Delta" delivery system that would widen channels and flood some islands. Some levees would be moved farther apart to create shallow fish habitats and reduce flood dangers.

■ Build a giant canal around the eastern edge of the Delta to deliver high-quality water directly from rivers to export pumps, ending pumping from the heart of the Delta itself.

The Walnut Grove hearing is one of 17 on the plan being held across the state. The next hearing, and the only one in Contra Costa County, will be May 13 in Pittsburg.